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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 005369

SIPDIS

FOR AF/S B. NEULING AND T. CRAIG

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SUBJECT: MOELETSI MBEKI CALLS ZIMBABWE A "LONG-TERM PROJECT"; URGES SUPPORT FOR MDC

REF: JOHANNESBURG 527

Classified By: Amb. Jendayi E. Frazer
Reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

1. (C) Summary. Moeletsi Mbeki, South African political commentator and brother of President Thabo Mbeki, urged the international community to stop "chasing" Mugabe's retirement and view Zimbabwe as a "long-term project." He called for increased international support for the MDC and Zimbabwean civil society. In his view, the MDC represents a new type of political party in Africa -- non-racial, non-ethnic -- and thus is a threat to the old style African political parties and also a valuable asset in rebuilding sub-Saharan Africa. Mbeki suggested that the recent election of Joyce Mujuru as Vice President is a positive sign that could lead to Mugabe's retirement in the future since Mugabe trusts her and her husband. Mugabe made a big mistake by deporting COSATU, Mbeki argued, because its two million members are now energized, although he did not believe this would alter South African policy in the short-term. End Summary.

2. (C) On December 7, 2004, U.S. Ambassador to Zimbabwe, Christopher Dell, and PolOff met with Moeletsi Mbeki, brother of President Thabo Mbeki and Executive Chairman of Endemol South Africa, a television production company. Mbeki is also Deputy Chairperson of the South African Institute for International Affairs, a well-respected foreign policy think tank. A prominent political commentator in his own right, Mbeki has been publicly and sharply critical of the Government of Zimbabwe in recent years. Mbeki worked as a journalist in Zimbabwe from 1982-1990. (Comment: Mbeki is reportedly not particularly close to his brother the President.)

Observations on Zimbabwe Crisis

3. (C) Discussing the political crisis in Zimbabwe, Mbeki suggested that the international community needs to view the country as a "long-term project." He urged focus on building processes now to produce results in 10-15 years, not "chasing" Mugabe's retirement.

4. (C) Mbeki observed that civil society in Zimbabwe is quite weak and urged increased support for building a more robust civil society sector. He noted that the MDC emerged so fast as a political force that it never engaged in the difficult and time-consuming work of organizing for a long-term struggle. Comparing Zimbabwe to South Africa, Mbeki observed that the roots of civil society in South Africa go back to the early 19th century, particularly the black churches. During the anti-apartheid struggle, the entire society played a role -- the political parties, business, churches, academics and unions. Zimbabwe does not have the same tradition. The liberation in Zimbabwe resulted from the military actions of two armies, ZANLA and ZIPRA, not a broad-based movement. (Comment: This interpretation seemingly exaggerates the significance of the military might of the liberation movements and underestimates the role of neighboring countries like Tanzania, Zambia, and Mozambique, the international community, and Zimbabwean churches, in pushing for a negotiated settlement.)

MDC Represents Future of Zimbabwe

5. (C) Mbeki painted a positive picture of the Zimbabwe's main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Mbeki claimed that the MDC represented the future of Zimbabwe; ZANU-PF is a "spent force." In his view, the international community needs to focus on supporting the MDC. (Comment: most South African commentators emphasize the weaknesses of the MDC and do not/not share Mbeki's upbeat assessment.) What MDC needs, Mbeki said, is state patron, just as the Soviet Union supported the ANC. Mbeki suggested that the United Kingdom would be the most natural ally, despite the fact that Mugabe would use this against the MDC. Mbeki pointed out that Mugabe already labels the MDC a tool of imperialist Britain, so would have little to lose by an open identification with the U.K.

16. (C) In Mbeki,s view, the MDC represented a new type of party in political Africa -- non-ethnic, non-racial -- a "mega-achievement." The MDC is thus a valuable asset in rebuilding sub-Saharan Africa. It also represents a threat to the old style, ethnic parties around the continent, including even the ANC. In this vein, Mbeki observed that, for political reasons, the ANC likes having an opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, headed by a white person.

17. (C) Mbeki pointed out several weaknesses in the MDC. First, they do not know how to ask for help, even from sympathetic African governments like Nigeria, Ghana or Kenya. Second, the MDC should make private property rights a key part of their political platform, essentially using the land issue against Mugabe. The MDC is afraid to do so because they fear being labeled defenders of white farmers. Mbeki suggested this is short-sighted since Mugabe,s land policy also resulted in massive job losses for commercial farmworkers, a key core constituency for the MDC. Finally, the MDC needs to mobilize the talented and huge constituency living in South Africa.

Recent ZANU-PF Congress

18. (C) Mbeki viewed the recent ZANU-PF party congress positively. He said that the "Mujurus," Vice President Joyce Mujuru and her husband Solomon Mujuru, were not "Shona tribalists" like Mugabe or Parliamentary Speaker Mnangagwa. Mujuru,s election as Vice President might even encourage Mugabe to step down at some point in the future. Mbeki speculated that Mugabe would retire only if he had total confidence that his successor would not turn on him. The Mujurus have been loyal to Mugabe from the beginning, and he trusts them completely.

Expulsion of COSATU Mugabe's Big Mistake

19. (C) Mbeki claimed that the expulsion of COSATU from Zimbabwe (see reftel) was Mugabe,s "biggest error." The SAG,s reaction to the deportation -- suggesting that COSATU "got what it deserved" -- was upsetting to COSATU's two million members and will resonate politically in the future. However, Mbeki thought it unlikely that the SAG would change its Zimbabwe policy, even if pressure from COSATU grew. Mbeki speculated that the ANC political strategists believed (wrongly in his opinion) that they did not need active labor support to win future elections.

110. (C) Mbeki also observed that most South Africans are not interested in foreign policy. To them, Africa is a big headache, a source of illegal immigration and crime. They see President Mbeki,s activities in Cote d,Ivoire, DRC and Burundi as nothing more than a "presidential hobby."

111. (U) Ambassador Dell cleared on this message.
FRAZER